

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-3 (canceled).

4. (currently amended) A content distribution system according to claim 53, wherein said monitoring apparatus is operable to issue an encryption key in addition to the authentication information, and said distribution apparatus is operable to distribute the one or more pieces of content together with the attached ~~authentication~~time identification information in an unencrypted form and the attached authentication information in an encrypted form encrypted using the encryption key, said monitoring apparatus further being operable to decrypt the authentication information in the encrypted form using the encryption key and to compare the decrypted authentication information with the authentication information in the unencrypted form to determine whether the one or more pieces of content have been distributed with authorization of the one or more owners.

5. (previously presented) A content distribution system according to claim 53, wherein said distribution apparatus is operable to embed the authentication information into the one or more pieces of content using a digital watermarking technique.

6. (previously presented) A content distribution system according to claim 53, wherein said distribution apparatus is operable to embed the authentication information into a distribution signal of the one or more pieces of content using a digital watermarking technique.

7. (canceled)

8. (previously presented) A content distribution system according to claim 53, wherein each piece of the one or more pieces of content has specific content identification information, said distribution apparatus being operable to store the distribution history for each piece of the one or more pieces of content distributed via said predetermined

distribution path in association with its specific content identification information, and to transfer only the distribution history associated with the specific content identification information by masking the distribution history for each piece of the one or more pieces of content with a predetermined filter.

9. (canceled)

10. (previously presented) A content distribution system according to claim 53, wherein each piece of the one or more pieces of content has specific content identification information, said distribution apparatus being operable to store the distribution history for each piece of the one or more pieces of content distributed via said predetermined distribution path in association with its specific content identification information, and said monitoring apparatus being operable to cause content identification information by which the distribution history can be addressed to be contained in the authentication information.

11. (previously presented) A distribution method for distributing one or more pieces of content owned by one or more owners from a distributor to one or more receivers and for determining whether the one or more pieces of content have been distributed with authorization of the one or more owners, the method comprising:

issuing to the distributor authentication information including time identification information indicating a time of issuance and distributor identification information assigned to the distributor;

distributing the one or more pieces of content via a predetermined distribution path with the authentication information attached thereto;

storing a distribution history for each piece of the one or more pieces of content distributed via the predetermined

distribution path in association with specific content identification information; and

monitoring the distribution of the one or more pieces of content in the predetermined distribution path to determine whether the one or more pieces of content have been distributed with authorization of the owner of the one or more pieces of content, based on the time identification information distributed with the one or more pieces of content, and to determine a distribution status of the distributed content based on the distribution history.

12. (canceled)

13. (canceled)

14. (currently amended) A content distribution method according to claim 11, wherein said issuing step further includes issuing an encryption key, and said distributing step distributes the one or more pieces of content together with the attached ~~authentication~~time identification information in an unencrypted form and the attached authentication information in an encrypted form encrypted using the encryption key, and said monitoring step further includes decrypting the authentication information in the encrypted form using the encryption key and comparing the decrypted authentication information with the authentication information in the unencrypted form to determine whether the one or more pieces of content have been distributed with authorization of the one or more owners.

15. (previously presented) A content distribution method according to claim 11, wherein said distributing step embeds the authentication information into the one or more pieces of content using a digital watermarking technique.

16. (previously presented) A content distribution method according to claim 11, wherein said distributing step embeds the authentication information into a distribution signal of the one

or more pieces of content using a digital watermarking technique.

17. (canceled)

18. (previously presented) A content distribution method according to claim 11, further comprising:

extracting only the distribution history associated with a specific piece of the one or more pieces of content by masking the distribution history with a predetermined filter.

19. (canceled)

20. (previously presented) A content distribution method according to claim 11,

wherein the authentication information includes identification information by which the distribution history can be addressed.

Claims 21-52 (canceled).

53. (previously presented) A content distribution system for distributing one or more pieces of content owned by one or more owners to one or more receivers and for determining whether the one or more pieces of content have been distributed with authorization of the one or more owners, comprising:

a distribution apparatus operable to distribute the one or more pieces of content to the one or more receivers;

a monitoring apparatus operable to issue, as authentication information, a set of (a) time identification information indicating a time of issuing the authentication information and (b) distributor identification information assigned to said distribution apparatus, and monitor a content distribution operation carried out by said distribution apparatus,

said distribution apparatus being operable to conduct the content distribution operation to distribute the one or more pieces of content via a predetermined distribution path to the one or more receivers, together with the authentication information received from said monitoring apparatus, the

authentication information being attached to the one or more pieces of content, and to store a distribution history including the authentication information corresponding to the one or more pieces of content distributed via said predetermined distribution path,

wherein said monitoring apparatus is further operable to determine whether the one or more pieces of content distributed by the content distribution operation have been distributed with authorization of the owner of the one or more pieces of content based on the time identification information distributed with the one or more pieces of content and to determine a distribution status of the distributed one or more pieces of content based on the distribution history.